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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Harvard Studies. I. Varia Africana. I.* ORIC BATES, Editor, F. H. STERNS, Asst. Editor. Introduction by THEODORE ROOSEVELT. The African Department of the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, Cambridge, 1917. Quarto. Pp. 292.

In the introduction to the Harvard African studies ex-President Roosevelt describes the enterprise which this volume represents as "the first serious attempt by Americans to contribute to the real study of the African." He might have added, with almost equal truth, that it is the first serious attempt by Americans to study the Negro.

Books have been written by Americans about the black man. Howard University, Washington, D. C., has a library of such books. There are other private collections, some of them running into several thousand volumes. Most of them are written in a controversial spirit. Many of them are theological, seeking to show, on the basis of scriptural quotations, that the social status of the black man is pre-ordained and eternally fixed. Others are pseudo-scientific attempts to solve the race problem by showing that the black man is not quite human. Some of them seek to prove, on the basis of anthropological data, that the Negro has no soul, hence efforts to Christianize him are hopeless.—Many more are written by Negroes to preserve some record of their meager history, or to defend the race against the monstrous attacks upon its humanity.

Such books are interesting and valuable as records of the sentiments and attitudes which the racial struggle has called forth in the black man and in the white. The strange distortions of fact and opinion which they record are significant, not so much for what they tell us of the Negro, as for what they reveal of the intensity of the racial conflict, and of the nature of the passions involved. Most books on the Negro in America published prior to 1900, and some books written since that time, are mainly valuable as source books for the social psychologist and the students of human nature. As literature they represent a melancholy anthology. As records of human nature, under the strains and stresses of a tragic although peaceful conflict, they have a new and fascinating in-

terest. It is in this sense that we can say, spite of all that has been written, that there are no scientific studies of the American Negro, there are only materials awaiting scientific interpretation.

It must be regarded as an event of the first importance, therefore, that an institution of the authority of Harvard University and the Peabody Museum proposes to publish a series of studies intended to cover the whole wide range of native African life and to extend these studies eventually to the descendants of the African peoples in America. No study of the Negro in America will be complete which does not take account of the African background of the race. On the other hand, no attempt to assess the qualities and capacities of the native African, living in his isolated and primitive environment, will be adequate which does not take account of the Negro's progress under the conditions of a civilized environment. As a matter of fact the Africans are the only contemporaneous primitive people who have anywhere achieved race consciousness and civilization without losing their racial identity. As a consequence almost every fundamental process and stage of civilization, from the most primitive to the most cosmopolitan man, is somewhere represented in the contemporary life of the Negro in Africa and America. It is this fact which lends significance to the present volume, since these studies propose to cover eventually the whole range of Negro life in Africa and America, so far as that can be done within the limits of the anthropological sciences. An editorial note at the end of this first volume describes the plan and scope of the proposed series of publications.

The Harvard African Studies is designed to consist of annual volumes—under the title of *Varia Africana*—made up of miscellaneous papers, and of occasional monographs presenting the results of original field or laboratory research.

The scope of the volumes may be defined as African anthropology in the widest sense. Only original papers are desired, but these may be of any length compatible with their presentation in a volume which is essentially in the nature of a journal, and may deal with any of the following subjects: psychology, archæology, ethnography, linguistics, sociology, ethno-geography, religion, folklore, or technology. A range so wide must perforce be limited in some directions, and the editors have therefore decided upon the exclusion of purely historical papers, even when the latter embody the political records of native tribes. As an exception to this rule, the editors may be willing, under certain circumstances, to accept historical material which, by establishing the presence of this or that group of people in a certain locality, or by throwing light on the nature or date of a migration, bears on racial questions and problems of primitive culture.

The series is open to papers of a non-controversial character dealing with a topic sadly in need of more scientific treatment—we refer to the question of the American Negro. The anthropometrist, the sociologist, and the folklorist have in this direction a field of research which, if approached with adequate knowledge, can be made to yield invaluable results. As these results cannot but be of practical importance, the editors are particularly anxious to have an opportunity of presenting them.

As a further indication of the method and purpose of these studies the editors emphasize that an effort will be made not only to add to the mass of information already extant in the writings of explorers, traders, and missionaries, but to correlate and organize the information already existing.

Travelers, missionaries, administrators, and scientists have published a vast amount of valuable information regarding the various peoples and regions in Africa. As yet, however, there has been comparatively little correlation of this evidence. Now that the day of the reconnaissance explorer is essentially past, and we begin to receive accurate and detailed studies of single tribes, it is highly desirable to have the great mass of published material carefully sifted, so that the future student and investigator may be able to make his efforts as productive as possible.

From even a few such documents, it might be possible to plot cultural areas, as has been done for North America—the areas in question being regions of fairly uniform culture, marked off with some sharpness from other such areas. It would then appear whether the African areas depended on geographic conditions, on plant or animal distributions, or on the superior inventive genius of certain tribes or races. On the other hand, it might appear that the whole culture area hypothesis was untenable, and that within any given geographic area, or within any given tribe, there would exist elements of culture which were adopted at widely differing times and belonged to different culture levels. Thus, a true stratification of cultures might be exposed. Yet again, it might be found that people living in similar environments tended to develop a like culture regardless of any contact or close ethnic affinities.

At the present moment the task of correlating existing material in such a way as to test the validity of current theories and presuppositions of the anthropological sciences is quite as important as that of adding to existing collections of information. In this way only can the mass of information now extant be made available for the use of students in the secondary social sciences, like sociology and political science, which are dealing with immediate and practical problems. It is only in this way, for example, that the knowledge we have gained of the Negro in Africa will contribute to the solution of the race problem in America.

Interesting as is the prospect which opens with the first volume of the African Studies, the untechnical reader will probably be

more impressed with imposing appearance of the volume, with the character of its illustration and its general typographical appearance than with its contents. These consist of twelve articles of an average length of 23 pages dealing with the following types: *Siwan customs*, *Oral surgery in Egypt during the Old Empire*, *Worship of the Dead as practiced by some African Tribes*, *The Paleoliths of the Eastern Desert*, *Notes on the Nungu Tribe*, *Nasawara Province*, *A study of the Ancient Speech of the Canary Islands*, *Benin Antiquities in the Peabody Museum*, *The Utendi of Mwana Kupon*, *Notes on Egyptian Saints*, *Dafûr Gourds*, *An Inscription from Gebel Barkal*, and *Ancient Egyptian Fishing*.

Perhaps the most interesting of these articles, for the sociologist, is that of R. H. Blanchard entitled *Notes on Egyptian Saints*. Sainthood, as the author remarks, "is not a difficulty of achievement in the Islamic world." Every hamlet has its shrine and in the larger villages there will usually be found two or three such sanctuaries. Once a year, on his birthday, a festival and religious fair in honor of the saint is held. The primitive character of these religious celebrations is attested by the orgiastic and often licentious performances that accompany them. For example on the occasion of the festival of el-Hamâl et-Rayah, a purely local celebrity, "the whole adult male population of the town, in defiance of all orthodox Moslem sentiment, intoxicated themselves with whatever alcoholic beverages they could procure. Half a dozen prostitutes, hired for the occasion, set up their booths or tents in the town, and received all comers. There was among the revelers a great deal of horseplay of the most licentious character, particularly in the vicinity of the booths if the *sharamît*. Drunken men were dragged into the lanes by their friends, and there left lying, exposed to the village wags and wits. In 1914 this festival was modified by Government, which suppressed the more offensive features of the celebration."

One of the most interesting of these saints referred to was "an old Negro slave well known for his long, harmless, pious life." It is generally held that the body of a man who has during his life attained an unusual degree of sanctity is gifted with a supernatural power which is often exerted on those who carry his bier to the grave. The supernatural power of this old Negro saint was attested to in the following peculiar way: "Having died toward evening, he would not, on any account, have himself buried the same evening, and the bearers, in spite of all their shouting of *la ilah*

*ill Allah* (sic), could not bring the corpse to the graveyard. It remained therefore, all night in the house (though the people do not like to keep a corpse at night), watched by a multitude of people praying. Next morning also it could not be buried for a long time, the blessed dead compelled the bearers to go through all the streets of the town, till at last, on the recommendations of the governor, the higher officials carried the bier to the grave, even the Turkish soldiers could not accomplish it. The whole town was in uproar. The Mohammadans say the angels exercise this coercive power. The Christians believe it is the devil."

It seems probable, as the author suggests, that we have in these religious festivals in honor of a local celebrity surviving examples of localized and more primitive type of religious cult which has not yet been wholly superseded by the religion of Islam, with its wider outlook and more rational conceptions of life. The notes here recorded suggest at once questions which can only be answered by further investigation and by comparison of the materials gathered in this region with those that are now being brought to light in other fields. It is the purpose of the Harvard African studies to answer these questions, so far as they can be answered by a study of African life.

Interesting from other points of view are the reproductions of the remarkable collection of Benin antiquities at the Peabody Museum, of the celebrated Vai syllabary, and of an interesting poem of 100 lines in the Suaheli language said to have been dictated by a dying mother to her daughter. Transliteration and translation accompany the reproduction in the original script.

ROBERT E. PARK.

*Fifty Years and Other Poems.* By JAMES WELDON JOHNSON. With an Introduction by BRANDER MATTHEWS. The Cornhill Co., Boston, 1917. Pp. xiv, 92.

From time to time for the last fifteen years Mr. James Weldon Johnson has been remarked as one of the literary men of the race. He has now brought together his verses in a little volume, *Fifty Years and Other Poems*, an introduction to which has been written by Professor Brander Matthews, of Columbia University. The task was eminently worth while.

The book falls into two parts. The first is made up of poems in the commonly accepted forms, though there are one or two